

Approved For Release 2000/08/08 : CIA-RDP96-00789R001001550005-5 Questions Linger in Algerian's Death

Press Looks Beyond Fundamentalists for Motivation of Assassin

By Jonathan C. Randal
Washington Post Foreign Service

ALGIERS, June 30—More than 36 hours after the assassination of chief of state Mohammed Boudiaf, Algeria's military-dominated government faced widespread questioning today about the identity and motives of Boudiaf's killer.

Although in permanent session since Monday's assassination, the government's two key bodies—the High State Council and the National Security Council—have said nothing of substance other than announcing an official investigation of Boudiaf's killing and arrangements for his funeral here on Wednesday.

But the freest press in the Arab world has underlined the lack of adequate security for Boudiaf's visit to the Mediterranean port city of Annaba and suggested that Islamic fundamentalists—who were poised to win a landslide victory in Algeria's first free parliamentary vote when the military government seized power in January and canceled the elections—were not the only group with reasons to kill him.

Suggesting "numerous" potential assassins, newspapers said Boudiaf's campaign for "radical change" and against corruption had upset not only the fundamentalists, but various vested interests that many Algerians believe wield excessive political and financial influence.

Boudiaf certainly angered fundamentalists by lending his reputation for honesty and his legitimacy as a hero of Algeria's war for independence from France to the military crackdown against them.

But since returning from a 28-year self-imposed exile, he criticized established interest groups and spurned offers of "national reconciliation" from established political parties.

Newspapers also referred to Boudiaf's repeated vows to punish corrupt officials and their well-connected friends for tax fraud and contraband trade.

In April, Boudiaf temporarily backed off the corruption issue after the rearrest of Gen. Mostefa Belhoucif, a former Defense Ministry official accused of taking kickbacks on arms procurement in the mid-1980s. At the time, informed sources said Defense Minister Gen. Khaled Nezzar, widely viewed as the real power in the regime, was concerned that the case would revive charges of other corruption in the military.

But in a recent communique bearing Boudiaf's mark, the High State Council, the unelected collective presidency hurriedly introduced after the army forced president Chadli Bendjedid into retirement, swore to punish the corrupt, "whatever their social position or hierarchical rank."

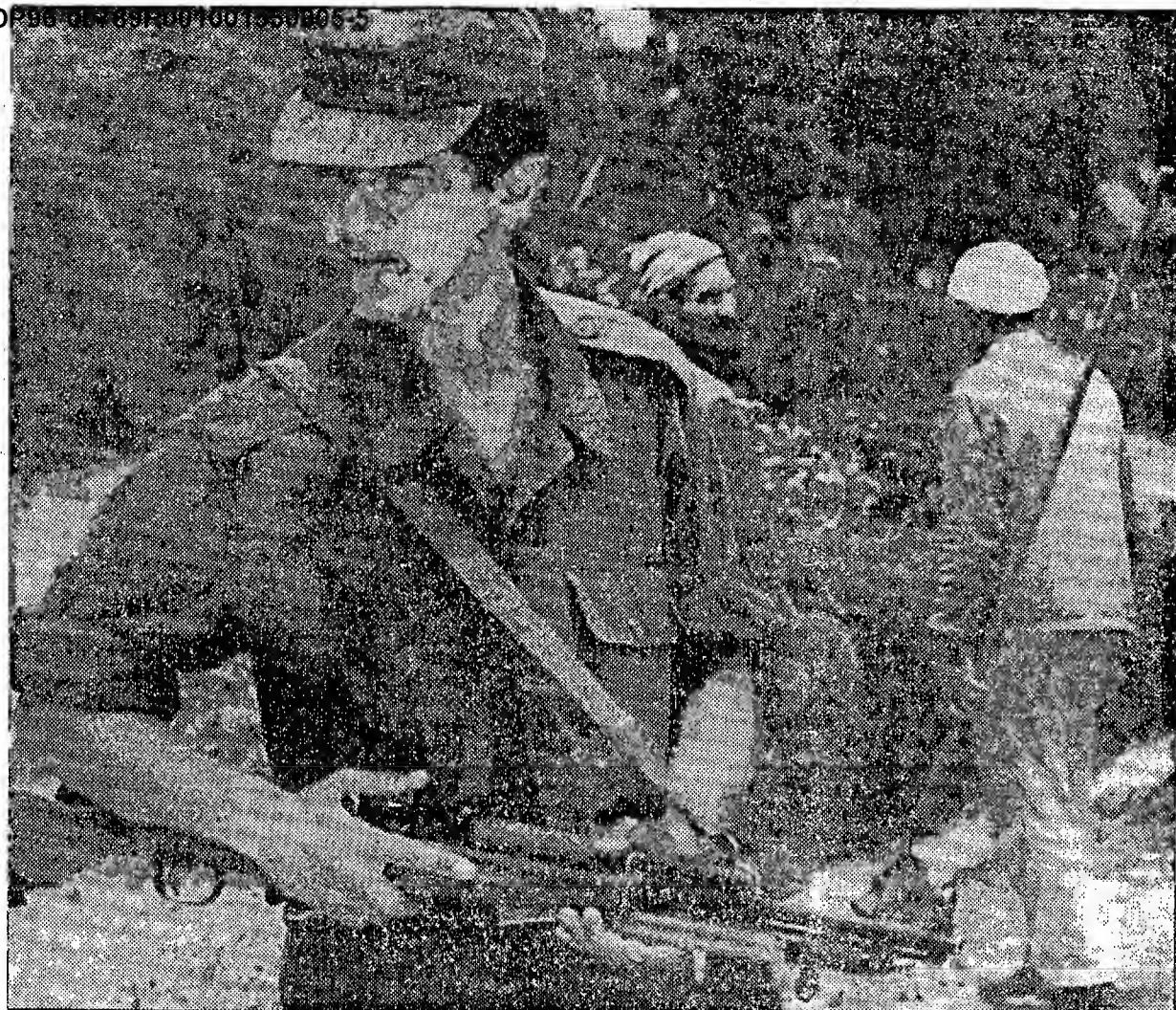
Known to be under study at Boudiaf's request was legislation providing criminal punishment for fiscal fraud and creating a special tax on those who could not legally justify their wealth.

The press also warned of the dangers in automatically blaming the fundamentalists for the murder. The daily Quotidien d'Algérie said such accusations "would only cast the non-fundamentalist, Muslim majority into the camp of the enemies of progress."

Some observers suggested that such reasoning was at the center of a debate that had paralyzed the government's two top councils: with some officials arguing for a stiffening of the state of emergency, in force since Feb. 9, that has allowed banning of the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front, arrest of its leaders and ouster of its elected officials.

Others, however, are said to be arguing that the regime should open up and accept some form of "national reconciliation" with the National Liberation Front, which monopolized power from 1962 to 1990, the Socialist Forces Front, smaller democratic parties and even moderate Islamic fundamentalists, including dissident members of the Islamic Salvation Front.

Among practical questions raised in the press were why Boudiaf's detailed itinerary in Annaba had been known for 10 days and whether the



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A soldier guards entrance to Algiers' al-Alia cemetery, where chief of state Mohammed Boudiaf is to be buried today.

security forces had been penetrated by the assassin, who apparently had no trouble entering the city's elaborately protected cultural center.

Although the official Algerian news service, APS, said the man who killed Boudiaf was wearing a riot

squad trooper's blue uniform, at least one reporter disagreed.

A reporter for the daily Le Soir d'Algérie said he saw Boudiaf's killer—"a man of medium build, with a heavy red beard," wearing a short-sleeved civilian open-neck shirt and a

neck sweater and trousers"—emerge from behind the stage, fire at the head of state, and then disappear by the same route.

APS first said the assassin was

killed, but later the High State Council said he had been captured.

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